2975 Laurel Street #20
San Diego, California 92104
February 12, 1988

NAMES Project
P. O. Box 14573
San Francisco, California 94114

Dear Friends,

The enclosed quilt panel was made in honor of Reino (Ray-no) Marttila (Mart-il-ah) Jr. Had Reino not been a person with AIDS, I may never have met him. As a volunteer in the Buddy Program of the San Diego AIDS Project, I was assigned to Reino soon after I completed my volunteer training in July of 1985.

Over the nearly fourteen months that we had together, we grew very close, even interdependent, our moods affecting each other. He listened to my joys and sorrows as much as I listened to his, and those times that we shared are among the most valued that I've ever had. Whether we went out to lunch, to the doctor's office, shopping, or just stayed home and cuddled on the couch, I came away feeling uplifted.

I entered the relationship expecting to be the nurturer, the giver. But Reino was also a skilled giver. No matter how sick he was, he found the words to touch my heart. Little statements such as, "I'm so glad your here", or, "You always make things better" fixed up my whole day.

Once when he was particularly ill, I lay down beside him on his bed and held his frail body close to mine until he stopped shivering. He said, "Oh God, I didn't think anyone would ever hold me again." His words made me realize the enormity of the isolation he had endured since his diagnosis. I knew that if I tried to speak, I would cry. We did a lot more holding after that.

Reino's final weeks were spent in a hospital, gradually succumbing to pneumonia. During that period we spent many silent hours just holding hands, no longer needing to speak. From time to time he would awaken with a start, and ask if someone else was standing at his bedside. Once he pointed to a solid wall and asked if there was a door there. I knew that he was very close to his transition and was trying to let me know. I spent his final night with him, listening to the pattern of his labored breathing, and hoping each time that it faltered that it would not begin again. At six AM, though he was still in a coma, I took him into my arms and said, "I know that it is time for you to go. But maybe you don't want to leave while I'm here. So I'm going home to rest now. We'll miss you very much. We'll cry and grieve and support one another. But it's OK for you to go." In less than an hour he had made his transition.

I was deeply honored that Reino allowed me to be part of this most intimate experience of letting go. He was not an educated man, but he taught me much. He was materially poor, but he found something to give. Now that I, too, am a person with AIDS, I am more fully aware of how he has prepared me. I know that he will assist me in my transition.

As I look back over the months we shared, the one image that always comes to mind is Reino's shining smile. Whether in good times or bad, he used it to lift our spirits. And so the panel that I have made in his honor commemorates that characteristic. The setting sun represents not only his radiant smile, but his life force in transition. It is set against a lavender sky because he was so happily gay. The butterflies symbolize his beautiful transition. The unicorns are there just because he loved them.

Enclosed are three checks totalling $30.00 in support of the NAMES Project Tour. Thank you for the healing work that you are doing and for providing a vehicle through which I can express my grief.

Love in the struggle,

Jess Jessop

R. "Jess" Jessop

P. S.: Enclosed is a stamped self-addressed envelop so that you can acknowledge receipt of this panel by the deadline for inclusion in the national tour.